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ABSTRACT

The concept of mainstreaming can be traced back to Brown v. Board of Education when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the "separate but equal" doctrine unconstitutional. Not everyone has wanted to integrate minorities into their physical education and athletic programs, and now not all educators are accepting the broadening of ability levels within the classroom to include the handicapped. Research has not confirmed that children in special classes achieve better than comparable children in regular classes. Research has shown that a similarity of play interests exists between learning-disabled and normal children. While much research shows the mildly retarded child to be one to three years behind peers in motor performance, it is generally believed that many such differences are environmentally caused. Often retarded school-age children have not received physical education instruction. It is thought that early integration of handicapped and normal children in good physical education programs will result in comparable motor skills for both groups. Lastly, research indicates that ability-segregated classes seem to have detrimental effects on both the feelings of exceptional children about themselves and of others toward them. The issue at hand is not mainstreaming in physical education, but humanizing all of education. (PB)

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MAINSTREAMING IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION: A POSITIVE APPROACH

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Mainstreaming, as the term is used today, applies only to persons with handicapping conditions. Historically, however, the concept of mainstreaming can be traced back to the 1954 case of Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (12). The United States Supreme Court ruled that the doctrine "separate but equal" in the field of public education was unconstitutional and deprived the segregated group of rights guaranteed under the Fourteenth Amendment. Thus began the era of school integration and busing, the exposure of prejudice and deep seated irrational fears, and perhaps a renaissance of the democratic tenets on which this country was founded. And what were the implications for physical education and athletics? The coaches had vast new resources of human talent to draw from, and communities seemed to readily accept the black athletes--at least as long as they helped the team to win. In the instructional setting where the blacks included all ability groups, it wasn't as easy. It never is when learning and sharing is the goal rather than winning. I remember one of our staff members with tears in her eyes on registration

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day pleading, "Please don't put <u>those girls</u> in my classes." Today she has fine rapport with the many blacks on our campus but she refers to the handicapped children whom we bring in for our methods classes as <u>those children</u>. Only last summer she refused to enroll the retarded in our children's swimming classes. Oh, not all the retarded--just those who looked different like the little ones with Down's Syndrome.

What human traits are satisfied by the separation of some children from others, by the denial of educational and recreational opportunities on the basis of race, sex, or ability grouping? We women know all about separate but equal physical education. Ask us about it in the small towns of America where there is but one high school gymnasium, one certified physical educator, and limited sports equipment. Try to understand why so many of us are excited about Title IX.

Mainstreaming is advocacy for minority groups. Slowly legislation and litigation are ending all segregation. The struggle is hard. The whites haven't always wanted to share with the blacks. Why, they insist, should they be forced to lower their standards by letting in persons from schools of acknowledged inferiority? The male athletes haven't been outstandingly chivalrous in sharing with the women. If we divide the athletic budget equally, then

neither of us can have a good program. Some school systems have phased out athletics altogether rather than try to reproportion funds. And now not all regular educators are gracefully accepting the broadening of ability levels within the classroom to include the handicapped. In each instance the majority defends their territorial rights, their quality, their privileged supremacy with little regard or sensitivity for minority wishes and needs. Quite often the majority has rationalized itself into believing that the minority is better off where it is, i.e. that handicapped children really can learn basic movement skills, sports, dance, and aquatics better in the adapted or special class than in an integrated heterogeneous setting.

What does research tell us about the efficacy of ability grouping and special classes? As early as 1951, Lockhart and Mott (11) found that superior performers in physical education benefitted to a statistically significant extent by being segregated. In contrast, the scores of inferior performers were not influenced by membership in a special class. Obviously the physical education methods courses which still emphasize the importance of small, homogeneous classes for sports instruction are based upon what is best for the intermediate and advanced players, not what is known about the beginner. Moreover tradition

with respect to the organization of beginning, intermediate, and advanced sections is so ingrained in physical educators that little research has been undertaken to investigate the ability groupings which best facilitate learning among beginners and/or the low skilled.

Special education research, however, is conclusive. <u>There is no evidence that children in special classes achieve better than comparable children who are left in regular classes</u>. Selected quotations follow from the numerous studies concerning the mildly and moderately handicapped which support mainstreaming.

> There are few significant differences between retarded children in regular classes and those in special classes. Notwithstanding the many obvious and valid criticisms of studies comparing special vs regular class membership, it has yet to be demonstrated that the special class offers a better school experience for retarded children than does regular class placement. (Blatt, 1960)

> It is indeed paradoxical that mentally handicapped children having teachers especially trained, having more money (per capita) spent on their education, and being enrolled in classes with fewer children and a program designed to provide for their unique needs, should be accomplishing the objectives of their education at the same or at a lower level than similar mentally handicapped children who have not had these advantages and have been forced to remain in the regular grades. (Johnson, 1962)

> Neither ability grouping with acceleration nor random grouping with enrichment is superior for all ability levels of elementary school pupils. In general, the relative achievement advantages of the two grouping

> systems were slight, but tended to favor ability grouping for superior pupils and random grouping for slow pupils. (Borg, 1966)
>
> So called special education in its present form is obsolete and unjustifiable from the point of view of the pupils so placed... Homogeneous groupings tend to work to the disadvantage of the slow learners and underprivileged. (Dunn, 1968)
>
> Despite its increasing popularity there is a notable lack of empirical evidence to support the use of ability grouping as an instructional arrangement in the public schools. (NEA Research Division, 1968)
>
> Educational research increasingly has undermined one of the essential premises of sorting: that it benefits students. The research concerning the educational effects of ability grouping and special education reveals that classification, as it is typically employed, does not promote individualized student learning, permit more effective teaching to groups of students of relatively similar ability or, indeed, accomplish any of the things it is ostensibly meant to do. (Kirp, 1974)

It should be emphasized at this point that these findings pertain only to children and youth with mild handicaps as does the entire rationale for my positive approach. Please remember, however, that 89 percent of the retarded are mildly affected, 6 percent are moderately involved, 3½ percent are severely retarded, and only 1½ percent are profoundly retarded. Similar statistics apply to the breakdown of other disabilities. In other words, mainstreaming is preferential education for 89 percent of the handicapped, all those who are more like than unlike their

normal peers in play interests and motor skills.

Relying upon current research findings, what alternative do we have but to reject the self contained classroom and/or gymnasium on the basis of educational ineffectiveness? What right do we have to segregate children who are more like their nonhandicapped peers than unlike them in play interests and motor skills? Illustrative of the research showing the similarity of play interests between learning disabled and normal children is that of Trammel and Sherrill (16). Chi square values used to determine significant differences in the preferences for 120 games on the Sutton-Smith Play and Game List. The subjects were 197 children classified as L D under special education legislative provisions in Texas and 197 not so classified. The ages ranged from eight through twelve. Out of the 120 games, there were only 18 on which the L D and normal boys disagreed enough to yield a significant difference. The two groups of girls disagreed enough to cause a significant difference on only 9 of the 120 games. Particularly interesting, in light of some of the learning disabilities literature to the contrary, was that both groups professed to like such competitive games as football, basketball, and baseball.

Ruda (15) currently engaged in an extensive interview study of the leisure interests and practices of mentally

retarded young adult men in a halfway house setting, is obtaining similar findings. These men, although institutionalized most of their lives at the Denton State School, are professing the same variety of interests in physical recreation as their normal peers. With the new freedom accorded by their change of residence to a halfway house, they are eagerly taking advantage of opportunities to participate in so-called normal recreational activities.

While much research (5, 14) shows the mildly retarded child to be one to three years behind his peers in motor performance, it is generally believed that many such differences are environmentally caused. At the time the classic study by Francis and Rarick (5) was being conducted, for instance, less than 25 percent of the retarded schoolage population in the United States was receiving physical education instruction. Small wonder then that the retarded were behind their normal classmates who participated in regular physical education. No research exists to my knowledge in which mildly retarded and normal children are equated first on years and quality of physical education instruction and then compared on the basis of motor skills. Widespread observation supports the premise, however, that the retarded pupil in a good physical education program is more like the nonretarded in motor skills than unlike him. The state

schools in Texas report basketball and baseball teams which compete equitably with nonhandicapped teams in the public schools. The Kennedy Foundation claims that about 90 percent of the Division I competitors in Special Olympics could compete satisfactorily against most normal children. In fact, data from recent International Games indicate that approximately 10 percent of the Division I athletes might be potential medal winners in Junior Olympic Competition for normal children.

It is believed that early integration of handicapped and normal children in programs of good physical education will result in comparable motor skills for the two groups. Moreover research summarized by Kirk (9) shows that the mildly retarded need the same family recreation and lifetime sports skills as the nonretarded, It is known, for instance, that 80 percent of the educable retarded marry and have children and about 83 percent are self supporting. Assuming that the mildly retarded and normal pupils in public schools need the same kinds of physical education, then why segregate them? It would make more sense to offer adapted physical education in addition to regular instruction to all pupils who fall more than two standard deviations below the norm on skill performance, not just the retarded.

An argument in favor of mainstreaming would not be complete without reviewing the research pertaining to the

affective domain. Jones (8) has analyzed the data from several studies involving more than 10,000 public school students, graduates, and drop-outs; college students; prospective and inservice teachers; and counselors. He concludes that

> (a) children reject the labels culturally disadvantaged and culturally deprived as descriptive of themselves; (b) that acceptance of such labels is associated with lower school attitudes; (c) that teachers hold lower expectations for performance of the deprived and disadvantaged child; (d) that the educable mentally retarded report (and teachers confirm) stigma associated with special class placement; and (e) that few strategies for the management of stigma in classes for the educable mentally retarded have been developed by teachers. (Jones, 1972)

Cristoplos (3), in another review of research, concluded that ability segregated classes seem to have detrimental effects on both the feelings of exceptional children about themselves and of others toward them. There appears to be widespread agreement that assignment to an ability grouping and/or a special class becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Children's belief in their inferiority is reinforced by the significant others who comment and/or worry about such special placement. Typically classmates and teachers make fewer demands on such children, and they come to accept others assessments of their potential. This does not, however, relieve the loneliness of

being different and/or excluded. The most valid statements in favor of mainstreaming come from the handicapped themselves. Everyone should read Stigma: The Experience of Disability, a collection of twelve essays by persons with such conditions as muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, and rheumatoid arthritis (6).

This is an uncomfortable book--not only because it reveals inadequacy of existing services for the handicapped but also because it reflects the sickness of a society which purports to be democratic on the one hand and on the other justifies separation and/or isolation of those who deviate from normalcy. Illustrative comments of the writers are:

> Society has to realize that first and foremost we are people equally with the non-disabled. Our social needs and aspirations are the same as their's.
>
> We need to become a part of normal society and not be isolated among our own kind.

From still another source come the words of a handicapped child. Having been failed by men, he has turned to prayer.

> Oh Lord, I come to Thee as the Supreme Comforter. I am called the defective child. The sons and daughters of men turn from me... My father thrusts me from him. My mother weeps... The school isolates me in a back room with others of my own kind.

Oh Lord, what have I done? Tell me, Thou who art all-wise and all merciful, what have I done? How I hunger for love and acceptance. How I yearn for playmates, yet none will play with me.

Is it a sin to be a defective child? Turn not from me, Oh Lord, I am innocent---innocent.

Adapted from The Prayer of the Defective Child by William Franklin Rosenblum

The issue at hand is not mainstreaming in physical education. It is humanizing all of education. The unconstitutionality of separate but equal education has been recognized for blacks and for women. Isn't it about time that we extend the rights of an integrated education to the handicapped also?

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